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# The Great War

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## **The Great War.**

BY JAMES P. WARBASSE,

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The world is staggered by the spectacle of a great war. Men who have no real antagonisms, but who on the contrary are bound by common interests, are killing one another. In the face of our possibilities for living as civilized beings this is the most unholy war the world has seen.

The men who kill and suffer and die have no quarrel. It is not a war of races or even of kings. The quarrel is between antagonistic financial interests, seeking marts of trade. Commercial greed and the privilege of exploiting more peoples are the spur and the goal. Kings, ministers and soldiers are all victims of this evil competition. The kings and ministers are the agents of the powers of property, and the soldiers are the dupes and tools of kings and ministers.

These agencies of capitalistic exploitation for generations have built armies and navies which have astonished the world and to do which they have denied children bread, clothes, shelter, and school, and plunged the great governments into bankruptcy from which they can not emerge. Built armies and navies for what? To protect the homes of the people? To save our wives and children from marauding invaders? Not at all. This bankruptcy of purse and soul has been invited in order that the few who own and control the land, the machinery of production, and the agencies of exchange might be protected in their privileges, expand and flourish.

For all this brutalizing savagery, the sufferings of the dying and living, the destruction of homes, the retardation of science and art, we have to thank the powers of capitalism—the competitive, profit-making system. These powers have been served by their three allies: race prejudice, patriotism, and the Christian Church.

Race prejudice has been called upon to rally the forces against one another. Of all the sins the world and its religions have fostered, this is one of the greatest. It is borne of

ignorance and misunderstanding of scientific facts. Failure to grasp the biological and ethnic principles which underlie the brotherhood of man, and acceptance of the falsehoods of history and tradition, have poisoned the minds of the nations; and in the moment of stress this ignorance and superstition have lent themselves to inflame the passions, and have prompted men who should clasp hands as brothers to rush at one another's throats.

Patriotism, the cry that the particular political machine represented by the government, which hides behind a flag or a king, must be preserved and esteemed above the interests of the individual and of humanity, is a fundamental causative factor in this war. It has fostered militarism and the worst of reactionary sentiments in government. The accident of geographical boundary lines, which are the products of warfare, sets men, who should be friends, against one another with the cry of patriotism. Ignorance of the larger patriotism, the patriotism which stands for the interests of society as against the interests of the dominant political machinery, the new patriotism with its larger humanity and nobler ethical conceptions has scarcely been permitted to enter the hearts of the people. They, who would make international wars, invoke the grosser patriotism. It is as much a stock in trade for them as it is for the great combinations of vested privilege which would defraud the people of their natural heritages. Scoundrels in large undertakings have ever cried up patriotism.

Race prejudice, nationalism, perverted history, ignorance of the social significance of warfare, and the teaching of religious superstitions instead of ethical culture and moral education, have all served the development of the vast armaments which we now behold as the consummate flower of the competitive capitalistic system.

This is a Christian war. It is waged by the great Christian nations which for a thousand years have sent their emissaries to other nations to teach them their conception of human brotherhood. The soldiers of the Czar go to the killing with the blessing of the Christian Church, and the assurance from the leaders of the church that the Christian God is with them in their brutalities. The Kaiser of Germany veritably believes that he and the Christian God are in intimate cooperation in this butchery, and the Christian Church of his realm supports him in his contention. All of the warring nations are invoking the help of the Christian God to give them success in their onslaughts upon their fellowmen. And what of the non-combatant Christian countries? Are their churches raising their voices to point out the fundamental immorality of

war, or doing a practical thing to prevent or stop it? No. These churches are utterly impotent to stay the slaughter. The most they venture to do is to pray inanely to their God to be merciful, and then smugly go about their business, leaving God to proceed with the slaughter. The Church is telling people that this is all because they have sinned, and that they should ask God's forgiveness. Sane people are replying that if there is an almighty God he should be asking our forgiveness.

Is the world to assume that this war is jealously watched over by God, and that ultimately He will bestow the crown of victory upon the army which has shed the most blood, strewn the earth with the most corpses, and despoiled the most homes? This is what Christendom asks us to believe. This is what will come to pass in the victorious nations: the Christian Church, which interprets its God to the world, will proclaim as the bloodstained victors come marching home from the slaughter that they have done God's holy work, and will proceed to thank Him for His cooperation. The Christian Church is so intimately a part and parcel of this war that it is obviously an affair of their God and theirs. They have been in it from the inception just as have the Krupps and the powder makers. All of whom are proceeding "their wonders to perform" in a way which is not mysterious to the discerning; but which to the dupes of Christendom is hallowed by a halo of of divine mystery.

We have witnessed the spectacle of the President of a great republic issuing a proclamation to the people, setting aside a day upon which they are urged to use their influence with God to stop the war. All this in the language of benighted medievalism, and in the year 1914! We are invited to prostitute our intelligence as well as our humanity to the Moloch of war and superstition.

We are taught with craven immorality to shirk the responsibility which is ours, to look into the sky for the cause of crimes of our own doing, and to appeal to an intangible being for help. In benighted cowardice we are urged to look for outside help, to implore an inconceivable creature to do for us the things we should be doing ourselves. Instead of rolling up our eyes we should be rolling up our sleeves and laying our hands to the task of righting the world's wrongs. So long as men look to an extranatural power to intercept and change the courses of events at their request to save them, just so long will they fail to secure salvation and will remain in the social slough. The guilt and the responsibility for this war belongs to mankind—all of us. To end it is our task. We need to have the sense

of responsibility driven home to us, and not driven away from us.

Praying to God is now practiced to a degree which is never seen in times of peace. The churches are busy, pretending to intercede between the suffering and the Omnipotence who it claims is in control of the situation. This is the harvest time for the superstitions. Reason is cast aside, and bestiality and superstition are enthroned.

Europe is now reaping the rewards of its unholy religious teachings. It has taught the people to worship a God who has gloried in bloodshed and slaughter. It has held up to the people as its most sacred document the literature which contains the recountals and the glorification of some of the most brutalizing and fiendish acts of warfare, massacre, and rapine that have stained the pages of history. It has compelled people not only to believe but to worship this document and this God.

While the Christian Church has declared for the brotherhood of mankind, it has been a potent factor in defeating this brotherhood. It has not only developed antagonisms and hatreds against the peoples of the earth who do not accept its tenets, but those who do it has divided into petty warring cliques. Its "brotherhood of man" has meant little more than a brotherhood of sectarian believers. History shows the "brotherhood" it has bestowed upon Jews, Mahommedans, the inhabitants of ancient Mexico and Peru, the Indians of North America, the Africans, and every alien people whom it could exploit. Christendom has sent the Bible around the world, and followed it with sword, syphilis, and rum. Europe has many times during the past two thousand years dearly paid the penalty for its superstitions. Had the energy which has been expended in compelling people to concern themselves with what God is going to do to them after they are dead been employed in teaching and developing the simple principles of decent social organization, Europe now might be a harmonious commonwealth of happy people instead of a vast field of human slaughter. The teaching that, "I come not to bring peace but a sword" has ever been a two edged gospel.

It may be contended that the church is not guilty but has been only a passive agent, giving its approval to whatever chanced to be dominant. It has been and still remains the agent of the ruling class. But as it has flaunted itself and claimed a directing power it should accept responsibility.

The money lenders, too, are enjoying their hey-day. The power of money—the invisible government behind it all—is reaping untold wealth and more power. This great coordinated international system could stop the war if it so desired. But

there are profits to be reaped. The belligerent nations must be financed upon terms agreeable to the powers of money; the stress in noncombatant nations must yield to the terms of the bankers; the enormous mass of securities held in the impoverished European countries is now ripe fruit ready to fall into the baskets of the money trust. Big finance is proceeding with cold-blooded deliberation to get the most possible out of the suffering of the bleeding nations. How to get the markets away from these people is now the supreme zeal of American business.

If the authorities of this great republic were wiser it would not be to a deaf and impotent God that they would bid the people address their prayers, but it would be to the powers of money that they would advise us to prostrate ourselves in supplication. We are wise enough to know that while the money-power ever cries up patriotism, money itself is never patriotic; and so we witness the United States government cooperating with these very predatory interests to gather the harvest while it is ripe.

While the Government has asked the people to pray to get the war stopped, it is at the same time helping big business to keep it going. We are sending grain and other food-stuffs to the belligerents, while the price of foods at home goes up and while unemployment and industrial distress weigh sorely upon the people. We are sending over powder, guns, and other munitions of war as fast as our factories can make them. All of this with the support of the Government which sanctimoniously prays to stop the war. Our national hypocrisy should fill us with shame.

What good may come of this war? Is any benefit possible which is to any degree commensurate with the harm? There is none, unless these dupes and tools of kings and ministers—this scarcely articulate mass of working men who represent the great bulk of the combatants—become conscious of the awful truth that they are being fooled; that their lives are exploited in war as in peace; that the patriotism they have been taught is but petty provincialism; that the race prejudices that have been instilled into them from the cradle are groundless hatreds; that the very religions they have imbibed have aimed to make them superstitious and submissive slaves—submissive to autocratic authority; and that all of these agencies have been fostered by the powers that combine for war. These soldiers should know that they are exploited slaves—their minds and bodies in bondage to the powers of property as were the chattel slaves of old.

The hope that the world has moved should give courage

that out of the tumult and chaos ultimately shall come the voices to tell these things to the warring peoples. The powers of darkness may still these voices with dungeon and bullet, but they will be heard. And those who bear aloft the torch of light shall go down to their graves and to history, proclaimed saviors of men,—they who cause the scales to fall from the eyes of the mass of the people that they may see the truth that shall make them free.

This is the hope: that these soldiers, who are spared, shall unite upon a common ground, hallowed by the blood of their fallen comrades; that they shall unite—Teutons and Slavs—all men capable of useful service, and the women who remained at home—that they shall unite and declare themselves an industrial army of human brotherhood, consecrated to wage a holy war against the agencies of warfare, against autocracy, the privileges of classes, and the superstitions which they have fostered. Against this brotherhood of men may we hope the powers of vested interest shall not prevail. Upon the social wreckage which these powers have wrought may there grow the flower of a better society and a sweeter brotherhood of man.

Out of this we may hope for more democracy, and a society in which the working class shall come into its heritage. But the people of the warring nations must unite to secure these benefits. There is danger that poverty may be the whip used to coerce them; that the "heroes" of war may desire to keep alive the military spirit; that autocracy may prevail because the people are too poor and too weak to beat it off; and that the false cry of patriotism may be raised, calling upon the people to stand together and save their beloved country—for the autocracy. There is danger because militarism will be in the saddle, martial law will prevail, and the power will be in the hand that holds the sword.

It is against these forces that social justice must contend. It is most probable that after the war internal revolution in the several nations will be necessary to secure for the people the only benefits which are possible. These revolutions are to be looked for as the true evidence that good at last may come out of the great sacrifice. It is to be hoped that these revolutions may be peaceful, and that the privileged classes will relinquish their war-causing privileges without a struggle; but they must be relinquished. The demand of the people should be for more democracy, and still more democracy.

All of the nations will be beaten nations at the end of the war, unless their people rise up and revolutionize them. This after all is to be the real war. The miserable slaughter now in progress is but an expression of capitalism just as are the



industrial slaughter and the unnecessary mortality of peace. But the post bellum revolutions which await the war lords and ministers will be the expressions of a warfare having a real basis and a real significance. These should be wars in which brothers are not pitted against brothers. There should be no class anachronisms here. On one side should be ranged vested interests, autocracy, militarism, the Church, and the privileged classes who live by the exploitation of labor, and on the other side should be ranged the men and women who desire to perform service for their daily bread, and to be allowed to live in peace with their neighbors. The lines of distinction are easily drawn: those who usurp the wealth on one side and those who create it on the other; those who stand for industrial slavery and the robbery of the socially useful on the one side, and those who have caught the vision of social justice and would introduce it into a better society on the other.

It is to this warfare which was before the Great War and which will be after it, that we must look for the redemption of the vanquished peoples. Warfare is unethical and brutalizing, but it exists, and it will remain unethical and brutalizing until social justice abolishes it. In the belligerent nations, the weakness, brutality, and unreasonableness of the capitalistic system should be driven home so trenchantly to the people that they shall rise up in their sorrow and resolve to destroy the cause of their suffering.

But the redemption of the belligerent nations alone will not abolish war. The causes still exist in other nations. The world will probably never again see religious wars as of old: science is rapidly abolishing the superstitious, and people no longer take their religions so seriously. But the economic causes of war persist. Wars will continue so long as international commercial interests clash. A European federation of states must come; but such a federation will clash with the interests of an American or Asiatic federation. World peace is assured only by the abolition of capitalism and the development of a federation embracing all the countries of the world.

This is a slow program. Something can be done to hasten it. The formation of an international world congress, with delegates sent by the people of every country, should be at once set on foot. Such a congress should be a legislative body. It should make the international laws governing sea traffic, international shipping and import duties, imperialism, quarantine, and armaments. No nation should be allowed to have an army or navy any more than a citizen now is. Disputes should be adjudicated only in court. The Hague should be developed into an international supreme court, before which all disputes should

be brought. If any army or navy is maintained there should be but one, and that jointly by all the nations.

The educational movement to bring about this result should at once be set in motion.

In the meantime the Great War goes on. The world is closely knit, compared with what it once was. There are no disinterested nations. All are within the war zone. All must suffer. It is as a plague. The non-combatant nations should not wait until invited. They should at once begin organization to intervene. The non-combatants have rights which the combatants must respect. The warring nations are inflicting untold harm upon us. If they may influence us, we may influence them. This war is a world pestilence, and it is our duty to plan to stop it. It is closer to us than was the war in Cuba in 1898. The duty of the people of this country is to take the initiative in the pacific movement. This should not be by a polite but impractical offer of our "good offices." We should start the movement for the world congress. It is conceivable that such a congress could be organized, could legislate against the war, and hale the combatants before an international court before the war is over.

These are the lines in which the United States might act instead of promoting the petty business in which it has thus far engaged. The moral value of such a movement would be incalculably great.

Whatever we do it behooves us to cry out against war, to educate our children away from it, to discontinue its glorification, and to cast out of our schools the perverted histories which exalt it. It is the monstrous crime of the nations; it is the consummate product of the great social sins.



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